

Art.B

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ROE , F. GORDON

Charles Bentley, member of
the "Old Water-Colour" Society.

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WALKER'S QUARTERLY

CHARLES BENTLEY

MEMBER OF THE "OLD WATER-COLOUR" SOCIETY

BY

Frederick
F. GORDON ROE

(Author of "Henry Bright, of the Norwich School")

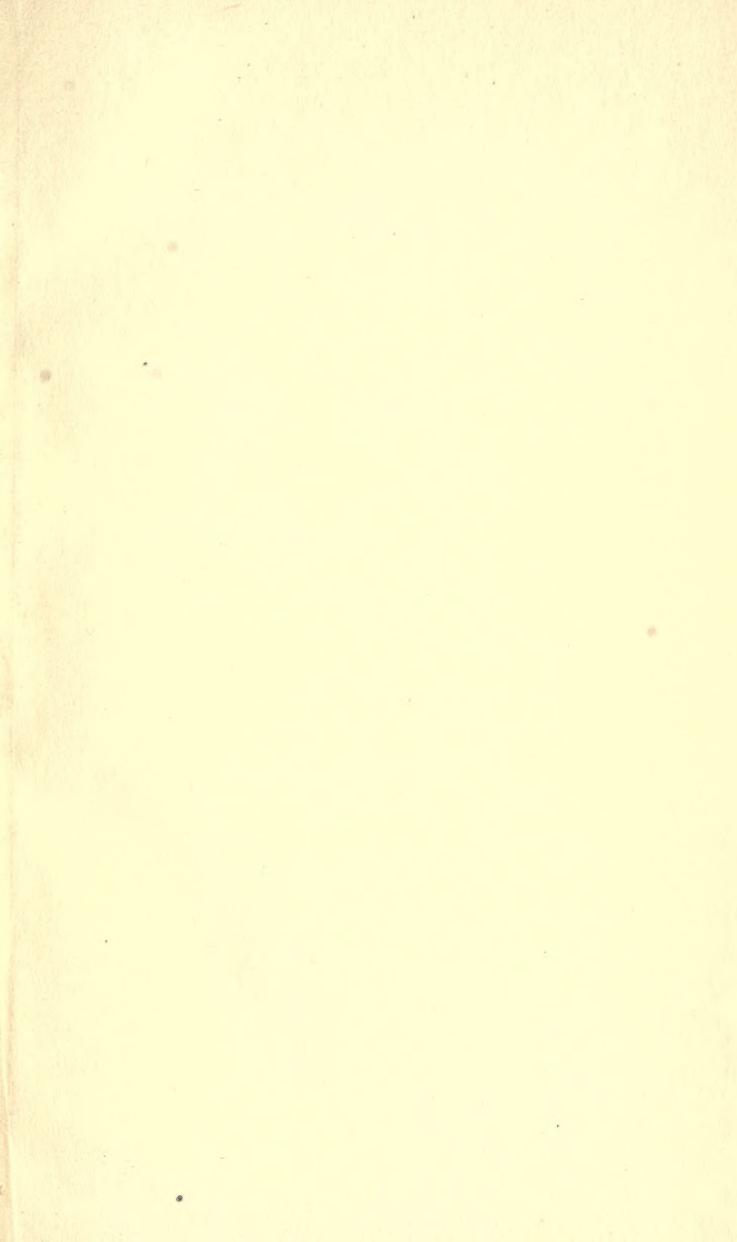


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WALKER'S QUARTERLY

No. 3

APRIL, 1921

CHARLES BENTLEY

MEMBER OF THE "OLD WATER-COLOUR" SOCIETY

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Charles Bentley

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By F. GORDON ROE

AT the commencement of last century Tottenham Court Road presented a very different aspect from the busy thoroughfare now linking the Hampstead Road to Oxford Street. There was hardly a building of any architectural pretensions in the vicinity—the British Museum was still plain Montague House—and such dwellings as there were abutted on all manner of rural backwaters, from the famous Field of the Forty Footsteps to the dismal haunts described by Dickens in the 44th chapter of "Barnaby Rudge." There were persons alive in 1832 who recalled a time when "the last house in London was the public-house in the corner, by Whitefield's Chapel": itself the most important feature of the highway. With the waxing of the century, however, Tottenham Court Road assumed a new importance. No later than 1838, a gloriously involved sentence in Tallis's "London Street Views"

remarked that the road "which, twenty-five years back, was almost the least business thoroughfare, *is now*, equal to, and there is as much retail trade done in it, than in any other street in the Metropolis."

It was in this highway, during 1805 or 1806, that the wife of a master-carpenter and builder, called Bentley, gave birth to a son, who received the name of Charles. The latter date is favoured in most reference books ; but both Messrs. J. L. Roget* and C. E. Hughes† possessed sufficient caution to qualify the statement ; whereas, Mr. Gilbert R. Redgrave‡ plumped boldly for the year of Trafalgar. In either case, it is interesting to note that the "Old Water-Colour" Society and its future member were born within two years of each other.

Only the most meagre details of Charles Bentley's youth are ascertainable, and those are mostly the fruits of reconstruction. It can be conjectured, for instance, that the bursting of Meux's great vat in 1814, and the consequent deluging of Tottenham Court Road and Oxford Street, impressed his boyish imagination. On

* "A History of the 'Old Water-Colour Society,'" by John Lewis Roget (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1891); Vol. 2, p. 238.

† "Early English Water-Colour," by C. E. Hughes (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd.), p. 162.

‡ "A History of Water-Colour Painting in England," by Gilbert R. Redgrave (London: Sampson, Low, 1892), p. 201.



Size $10\frac{1}{2} \times 7$ ins.

the other hand, it is certain that, in common with so many other talented painters, he had displayed an early affection for art. Mr. Roget, quoting from the Joseph John Jenkins MSS.,* cites the testimony of Bentley's mother as to this. He had "shown from his earliest days a taste for drawing," in consequence of which he was placed with Mr. Fielding to colour prints." This was Copley Fielding's brother, Theodore Henry Adolphus (1781-1851), to whom Bentley was eventually apprenticed in order to learn aquatinting. Whilst thus bound, "he went to Paris to do a work Mr. F. had there"—probably an "Excursion sur les Côtes et dans les Ports de Normandie" (Paris, 1823-5). Bentley's name does not occur on any of the plates, most of which are after Bonington, but those of Thales and Newton Smith Fielding are liberally represented, so it is quite possible that he assisted in the production. (Mr. H. M. Cundall states, by the way, in his "History of British Water-Colour Painting," published by John Murray, 1894, that Bentley was "articled to Theodore and Thales Fielding.")

About this time, Bentley formed a life-long friendship with William Callow. Born in 1812, Callow commenced print-colouring and aqua-

* "A History of the 'Old Water-Colour Society,'" by John Lewis Roget (London : Longmans, Green & Co., 1891) ; Vol. 2, p. 238.

tinting under Theodore Fielding in 1823 at 26, Newman Street, Oxford Street, where he worked from 8 a.m. till 6 p.m. daily.* When Fielding removed to Kentish Town in 1825, Callow "was articled to him as a pupil for eight years for instruction in water-colour drawing and in aquatint engraving. . . . There were two other pupils, Charles Bentley and John Edge,"† both of whom assisted Callow to master the technical side of his calling. It was Bentley, indeed, who gave him his first painting lesson, and encouraged the growth of his "natural talents."‡

These early reminiscences of Callow's are of the utmost importance, not only in determining the period of Bentley's articles, which expired in 1827, but also in proving that painting was already receiving his serious attention. To what extent Bentley prosecuted his study of water-colour technique during the next five years can only be surmised. He did not immediately sever his old connection, however, but supported himself to some degree by engraving or designing plates for periodicals. Roget mentions several, chiefly in works of the

* "William Callow, R.W.S., F.R.G.S. An Autobiography." Edited by H. M. Cundall, I.S.O., F.S.A. (London: A. & C. Black, 1908), p. 3.

† Ibid, p. 4.

‡ Ibid, p. 5.



Size 25 x 13 ins.

TREPORT

“Keepsake” order, but the value of the list is vitiated by a confusion of identities. Thus, the name “J. C. Bentley” appearing on certain plates is implied to be an engraver’s error. One prefers to see in it, however, the mark of another painter-graver, Joseph Clayton Bentley (1809-1851), whose style was not entirely dissimilar to his namesake’s.

With 1832, the misty annals of Charles Bentley’s early life begin to be supplanted by indisputable facts. He is discovered as the author of four drawings at the New Society of Painters in Water-Colours’* 1st Exhibition; which were followed by six in the succeeding show. He was then installed at 15, Bateman’s Buildings, a narrow turning still to be found on the south side of Soho Square, where he remained for another six years. Only two of these were devoted to securing the “New Society’s” approbation, however, since on February 10th, 1834, Bentley was elected an Associate-Exhibitor of the “Old Water-Colour” Society.† His initial contribution to the latter consisted of five drawings; followed by a like number in 1835; three in 1836; and three in 1837. By 1838 he had removed to 11, Mornington Place, Hampstead Road, which, saving for a

* Now the Royal Institute of Painters in Water-Colours.

† Now the Royal Society of Painters in Water-Colours.

three-year hiatus, remained his home till the last. Notable amongst his 1838 exhibits were two imaginative compositions: "From the Red Rover" and "From Tom Cringle's Log," respectively representing a naval engagement and a sinking slaver. The long and lurid quotations attached to these in the catalogue are omitted in the list at the end of this memoir.

From 1838 to 1841, Bentley's annual total at the "Old Water-Colour" Society remained steadily at six items; in 1842 and 1843, it was increased to eight. The catalogues for the last-named year (the first in which he was "hung" at the British Institution), locate him at 20, Charlotte Street, Portland Place, which he shared with Callow until the latter's marriage. January 12th, 1843, witnessed his elevation to full membership of the "Old Society," which was duly noted in the 1844 catalogue. He then exhibited ten water-colours; but, in 1845, he reached his record by sending sixteen works—a record only to be repeated in his last year, although those intervening never saw less than a dozen drawings hung at the Society's rooms.

In 1846, Bentley was back at 11, Mornington Place, working hard, and with but eight more years to live. He thrust out a fresh feeler in 1851, by sending to the (Royal) Society of



Size 17 × 11½ ins.

British Artists, but did not contribute more than three works all told to the Suffolk Street Exhibition. It is sad to find that years of toil never brought a competence to him. "He was uncertain in his transactions, and always poor," wrote Samuel Redgrave in a sentence that could serve as epitaph for all too many men of talent.

"Always poor!" Long after his death, a drawing by Bentley "appeared in one of the public sale-rooms . . . attributed to Turner, under whose name it had, I believe, enjoyed a brief span of high-priced honour."*

One of the saddest associations in the long history of art is embodied in the constantly recurrent phrase, "always poor." It is awful merely to attempt to realise how many brilliant exponents have been, are, and must be numbered in that category.

Bentley practically died in harness. Having contracted cholera, he expired after a very brief illness on September 4th, 1854. Administration of his effects, which were sworn as not exceeding £300, was granted (20th September, 1854) to his widow, Eliza.

"The prevailing epidemic," said the "Art Journal" (1854), "has carried off one of the most valuable of the members of the Old

* Mr. C. E. Hughes; *Op. Cit.*, p. 163.

Water-Colour Society, Mr. Charles Bentley, whose pictures of marine subjects were among the most attractive works in the annual exhibitions of that institution. Mr. Bentley, whose age was not more than 48, died after a few hours' illness on the 4th September."

The "Athenæum's" obituary (September 9th, 1854) was no less commendatory: "The Old Water-Colour Society has just lost a valuable member in Mr. Charles Bentley—and lost him before his time, since the papers announce his age to have been 48. In marine landscapes and other subjects of the kind he may be ranked between Messrs. Copley Fielding and Callow."

The range of Bentley's sketching excursions can be gathered to some extent from the subjects which he painted. He seems to have travelled fairly freely in England; very much less so in Scotland; to have made trips to North and South Wales; and to have had some acquaintance with Jersey and the North of Ireland. The picturesque atmosphere of Normandy made a special appeal to him, which he answered on several occasions. Thanks to Mr. Cundall's scholarly editorship of Callow's autobiography (to which I have previously alluded), it is possible to date four such visits with exactitude. Bentley, Callow

and Edge met together, for the first time since their pupilage in Paris, during the autumn of 1836; and the two former, with Outhwaite, the engraver, visited Rouen and Havre, "making sketches by the way."* Other trips to Paris with Callow took place in 1840 and 1841;† and the pair also went to St. Malo, Avranches, Caen, Dieppe and Abbeville on the latter occasion.‡

The drawings of Venice, Holland and Dusseldorf which made spasmodic appearances at the "Old Water-Colour" Society need not necessarily be accepted as evidence that Bentley had ever travelled so far afield. Such, at any rate, was Mr. Roget's opinion, with which, in the absence of contrary data, I am disposed to agree. It is obvious that Bentley could not afford to ignore the commercial aspect of his profession, and there is ample proof that he sometimes worked up sketches by less skilled hands. The "Old Society's" exhibitions of 1841 and 1849 contained views in Trebizond and Abydos which were frankly admitted to have been executed after studies by "Coke Smyth, Esq."; and yet

*"William Callow, R.W.S., F.R.G.S. An Autobiography." Edited by H. M. Cundall, I.S.O., F.S.A. p. 62.

†Ibid, p. 74.

‡Ibid, p. 86.

another example of this bread-winning craft is to be found in a work by Sir R. Schomburgk, "12 Views in the Interior of Guiana." published by subscription in 1841 (Ackermann, Strand). The sketches for these records "of an investigatory Tour of Guiana, under the direction of the London Royal Geographical Society and Her Majesty's Government," were made by Mr. John Morison, who went as draughtsman, but "the artist's finish, the effect of colouring, light and shade, were communicated . . . by Mr. Charles Bentley, whose drawings in water-colours have long been esteemed."

Although Bentley did not visit all the places he utilized as subjects, and was obliged to accept commissions for what can only be regarded as hack-work, his true merit was apparent to others than the brother-brushes who elected him to the "Old Society." Nagler's "Künstler-Lexicon" contains one of the first serious appreciations of his work that can be found, and is doubly interesting from the fact that it was written only three years after Bentley's début as an aquarellist. It describes him as "a leading London water-colour artist, now alive (1835), who serves a special purpose among those Englishmen who practise this form of art. He paints splendid views, which leave nothing to be desired in the tone and strength



Size 26 x 19 ins.

MOUNT ST. MICHAEL

of the colours. His water-colours are thus greatly sought after by lovers of art, and are only to be found in first-class cabinets." It is to be feared, however, that he got more praise than pence. Samuel Redgrave hints that Bentley was exploited by persons possessing more regard for their own than the artist's pocket. In an artistic profession, recognition and riches are not synonymous.

It is unnecessary to add much to Nagler's criticism quoted above. Bentley's interests were centred in scenes on and off shore, and though he did not entirely confine himself to their portrayal, it is with them that his name is most readily connected by present-day collectors. A keen colour-sense and adroit control over his medium combined to give his style a cachet which holds its own against the work of many better-known contemporaries.

In compiling the present account of Charles Bentley's life, I have had resource to a large number of books in addition to those to which I have already acknowledged indebtedness. My principal guide to clues, however, has remained in Mr. Roget's well-known and valuable work, but even here are one or two passages calling for comment. In the first place, we are told that Bentley exhibited nowhere before his election to an associateship

of the "Old Society." As a matter of fact, he had been represented for the previous two years at the opposition show in Old Bond Street (where it was then situated). So much can be gathered from the text, but it remains to be noted that Mr. Roget's total of works exhibited by Bentley at the Old Water-Colour Society is 197. Mr. Algernon Graves, on the other hand, allows 209, a figure precisely agreeing with my own independent enumeration. The difference is too heavy to be ignored, but may possibly be traced to some "telescoping" of titles. Bentley's titles were not distinguished by diversity, and this detail, aggravated by two misprints corrupting the artist's initial into "S" and "A," may have had some share in promoting confusion.

Although of purely academic interest in themselves, it is necessary to note such objections in the case of one whose genius has failed to preserve his history from forgetfulness.

Works Exhibited in London by Charles Bentley.

(The arrangement of works in each year is dictated solely by convenience, and bears no necessary relation to their comparative importance. Several obvious misprints in the original catalogues are here corrected.)

New Society of Painters in Water-Colours.

- 1832 View in the Highlands
View near Dunkirk
Coast Scene
Near Lichfield
- 1833 Windmill in Devonshire
St. Michael's Mount, Cornwall
Scene in Derbyshire
Isle of Wight
River Dart, Devon
Near Lichfield

Old Society of Painters in Water-Colours.

- 1834 Scarborough, Yorkshire
" "
Coast Scene
Wreck on the Coast of Skegness, Lincolnshire
Church of Santa Salute, Venice
- 1835 On the Thames—Battersea
View from the Promenade, Venice
Skegness, on the Coast of Lincolnshire
View on the Dart
Portsmouth

Old Society of Painters in Water-Colours.

- 1836 Dunluce Castle, Loch of Antrim
Near Bonchurch, Isle of Wight
Near Lichfield

- 1837 The Raft (*S. Bentley in catalogue*)
 On the Coast, Lincolnshire
 Kingswear, on the Dart, Devon
- 1838 Innisfallen Island, Lower Lake, Killarney
 Dunluce Castle, County of Antrim
 Sligo, Ireland
 From the Red Rover
 From Tom Cringle's Log
 The Lower Lake, Killarney
- 1839 Garden Scene
 Ferry Boat
 Off Dieppe (*A. Bentley in catalogue*)
 Wicklow Bay, Ireland
 Tenby, South Wales
 Tenby Bay, Wales
- 1840 On the Beach near Dover, looking towards
 Folkestone
 Entrance to Sligo Harbour, Ireland
 Santa Salute, from the Piazzetta, Venice
 Ferry Boat
 Near Penzance, coast of Cornwall
 Needles, Isle of Wight
- 1841 Trebizond, Black Sea; the lower range of the
 Caucasus—after a sketch by Coke Smyth, Esq.
 Lock Scene
 Abydos, Dardanelles—from a sketch by Coke
 Smyth, Esq.
 Fishing Boats, Wicklow Bay, Ireland
 Donegal Bay—Killybegs Mountains in the
 distance—Ireland
 Fishing Boats running into Harbour in a stiff
 breeze
- 1842 Fécamp Coast, Normandy
 Avranches, Normandy
 Tréport, Coast of Normandy



Size 13 x 7 $\frac{3}{8}$ ins.

- Pier at Broadstairs, Fishing Boat running in—
Early Morning
- Northfleet, on the Thames
- Scene near Munthorpe, Lincolnshire
- Oyster Women on the Coast at Granville
- Hay Barge off the Nore
- 1843 Brig and Fishing Boats off St. Valery, Coast of
Normandy
- Tréport, Coast of Normandy
- Granville, Coast of Normandy
- Scene in the Mountains near Tal-y-Bont, Wales
- Vale of Llanrwst, from Roe, North Wales
- Hay Barges, etc.—Mouth of the Medway
- Pont Hugon (? Pont Wgan), on the River Roe,
North Wales
- Tenby, South Wales

British Institution.

Water-Mill on the Roe, North Wales. 3'10" × 3'3"

Old Society of Painters in Water-Colours.

- 1844 Spithead—Seventy-four firing a salute on leaving
port
- Dutch Boats off the Coast of Holland
- On the Thames—an Indiaman being towed up—
Early Morning
- Town and Castle of Dieppe, from the sea
- Mont St. Michel, Coast of Normandy—Early
Morning
- Portmadoc, North Wales—Storm clearing off
- Dieppe Pier—Fishing Boats going out
- Making Signals for a Pilot off St. Malo
- Fishing Boats running into Harbour
- Near Burgh, Fens of Lincolnshire

- 1845 Tremadoc, North Wales
 Collier on a Sand-bank, off Leigh, on the Thames
 Wreck on the Rocks off Elizabeth Castle, Jersey
 East Keal, Lincolnshire
 Quillebœuf, on the Seine
 An Indiaman lying-to—Making Signals for a Pilot
 Fishing Boats off Leigh, on the Thames
 Ballyshannon, Donegal, North of Ireland
 Granville—Coast of Normandy
 Salmon Trap, on the River Lledr, Pass of Dolwyddelen, North Wales
 Broadstairs—an Indiaman in distress: Boat going out to her assistance
 Cardigan Bay, North Wales
 Near Festiniog, North Wales
 Alton, Lincolnshire—Storm clearing off
 Haymaking, Tetford, Lincolnshire
 Traeth Mawr—Range of Mountains, Snowdon, etc., from Tremadoc

British Institution.

- Dutch Boat, etc., off Ostend. 3' 2" × 4' 4"
 1846 In the Pool, Thames—Greenwich in the distance
 Broadstairs—Fishing Boats preparing for sea.
 3' 0" × 4' 3"

Old Society of Painters in Water-Colours.

- Lock Scene, near Boston, Lincolnshire
 Wreck on the Rocks, Dunluce Castle, North Ireland
 Fishing Boats off Granville, coast of Normandy
 Leigh, on the Thames—Sunset
 In the Downs—Deal in the distance
 On the Medway

- Pilot Boat—Folkestone in the distance
 Near Penmachno, North Wales
 Granville, Coast of Normandy
 Dusseldorf, on the Rhine
 On the Coast, Southend
 Mountain Scene, from Portmadoc, North Wales
 Wreck on the Sands, Criccieth Castle, Cardigan Bay
1847 Scene in the Bay of Cardigan—Criccieth Castle
 Fresh Breeze—off Whitby, Coast of Yorkshire
 Fishing Boats off St. Malo
 Bay, Donegal, Killybegs Mountains, North of Ireland
 Scene in the Downs—Dover in the distance
 Corn Field, near the Pass of Llanberis, North Wales
 Ferry Boat—Storm clearing off
 Fishing Boats preparing for Sea
 Sea Piece—Coast of North Wales
 On the Coast—Normandy, near Tréport
 Tattershall Castle, Lincolnshire—Evening
 On the Coast, near Tremadoc, North Wales
 Dover Castle
 Elizabeth Castle, Jersey—Sunset
 On the Coast, Southend—Boat running on shore
1848 Haymaking—Tattershall Castle, Lincolnshire
 Criccieth Castle, Cardigan Bay, North Wales
 Edinburgh, from the Sea
 Quilleboëuf, looking up the Seine
 Landguard Fort, Harwich in the distance
 Near Burntisland, Coast of Fifeshire
 On the Essex Coast, near Harwich
 Harwich, from the River Stour
 St. Michael's Mount, Coast of Cornwall

Killybegs Mountains, Donegal Bay
 On the Coast of Normandy
 Scarborough, from the Sea
 An Old Breakwater on the Coast, Essex
 Fishing Boats running into Harbour—Storm
 coming on
 Near Coningsby, Lincolnshire

British Institution.

- St. Malo, from the Sea—Fishing Boats. 3'1" × 4'4"
 1849 Harwich, from the Stour. 4'0" × 5'7"

Old Society of Painters in Water-Colours.

- Town and Harbour of Sligo, Ireland
 On the River Stour—Harwich in the distance
 Tattershall Castle, Lincolnshire—Sunset after a
 Storm
 Lower Lake, Killarney, Ireland
 Tréport, Coast of Normandy
 Bantry Bay, Ireland—Storm clearing off
 Mountain Scene, near Sligo, Ireland
 Mont St. Michel, Normandy
 Kirkcaldy, Coast of Fife
 Trebizond—Distant range of the Caucasus—
 after a sketch by Coke Smyth, Esq.
 Mountain Scene from Portmadoc, North Wales
 Off the Dutch Coast
 1850 Men-of-war in the Medway—Sheerness in the
 distance
 Mountain Scene, on the River Roe, North
 Wales
 Mountain Scene, Snowdon—taken from Tre-
 madoc
 Vessel on the Rocks—Scarborough in the
 distance



Size $10\frac{1}{4} \times 7\frac{1}{2}$ ins.

Wreck on the Coast of North Wales—Criccieth
Castle

Burntisland, Coast of Fifeshire, Scotland

Dunluce Castle, North of Ireland

The Town and Harbour of Sligo, Ireland

Mountain Scene, near Glengariff, Ireland

Fishing Boats running into Harbour

On the Yorkshire Coast, near Scarborough

St. Catherine Rock, near Tenby, South Wales

Fishing Boats off the Coast of Normandy

On the Medway

British Institution.

Edinburgh, from Inchkeith Island. 3' 9" × 5' 7"

1851 On the Medway—Sheerness in the distance.
4' 1" × 3' 10"

Society of British Artists.

An Indiaman lying-to, making signals for a
Pilot, off Dover

Old Society of Painters in Water-Colours.

Sunset—on the Thames, near Limehouse

Tenby, South Wales

Irish Peasants returning from market—Killybegs
Mountains, Coast of Donegal, Ireland

Coast of Cardigan, near Portmadoc, North
Wales

Fishing Boats pushing off—Holy Island, Coast
of Northumberland

Fishing Boats running into Harbour

Mont St. Michel, Normandy

Portobello, looking towards Edinburgh

Burntisland, Coast of Fifeshire

Wreck off Bamborough Castle, Coast of North-
umberland

Wicklow Bay, Ireland

- Fishing Boats off the Coast of Sheerness
 Mountain Scene, near Bettws-y-Coed, North
 Wales
 Fishing Boats off St. Valery-en-Caux, Coast of
 Normandy
 Scarborough Coast, Yorkshire
 1852 Mountain Scene, near Roe, North Wales—
 Evening
 Scene in the Highlands
 Cærnarvon Castle—Sunset
 South Foreland—near Dover
 Dover, from the Channel
 Broadstairs
 Summer Afternoon, on the Thames, near Erith
 Granville, Coast of Normandy
 Elizabeth Castle, Jersey—Sunset after a Storm
 Tremadoc, North Wales
 Fishing Boats
 Scarborough, Coast of Yorkshire
 On the Lledr, near Bettws-y-Coed

 Society of British Artists.
 Burntisland, from the Firth of Forth

 British Institution.
 Fish Girls on the Coast of Normandy.
 4' 0" × 3' 11"
 1853 Elizabeth Castle, Jersey—Sunset after a Storm
 20 guineas

 Old Society of Painters in Water-Colours.
 Sligo, Ireland
 Fishing Boats off Ramsgate
 Mountain Scene, near Bettws-y-Coed, North
 Wales
 Dunluce Castle, Ireland—Sunset after a Storm

On the Coast of Fifeshire, Scotland
 Coast Scene, near Harwich
 Old Pier at Broadstairs
 Mountain Scene, Donegal Bay, Ireland
 Elizabeth Castle, Jersey—Storm clearing off
 Mountain Scene, near Portmadoc, North Wales
 Fishing Boat, near Southend
 Vale of Dolwyddelen, North Wales
 Cardigan Bay, North Wales
 Sea Piece

- 1854** Composition—Evening
 Scarborough
 Looking up the River from Southend
 Tattershall Castle, Lincolnshire—Sunset after a
 Storm
 The Dogana, Venice
 South Foreland—Dover in the distance
 Tintern Abbey
 Ballyshannon Bay, Ireland
 Wicklow Bay, Ireland
 Sea Piece
 Hastings, from the Sea
 Street Scene—Verona
 Torquay, Devonshire
 Bantry Bay, Ireland
 Portmadoc, North Wales
 Burntisland, Coast of Fifeshire

British Institution.

Donegal Bay—Mist clearing off from the Killy-
 begs Mountains, Ireland. 80 guineas

Society of British Artists.

Fishing Boats off Quillebœuf, Mouth of the
 Seine

WALKER'S QUARTERLY

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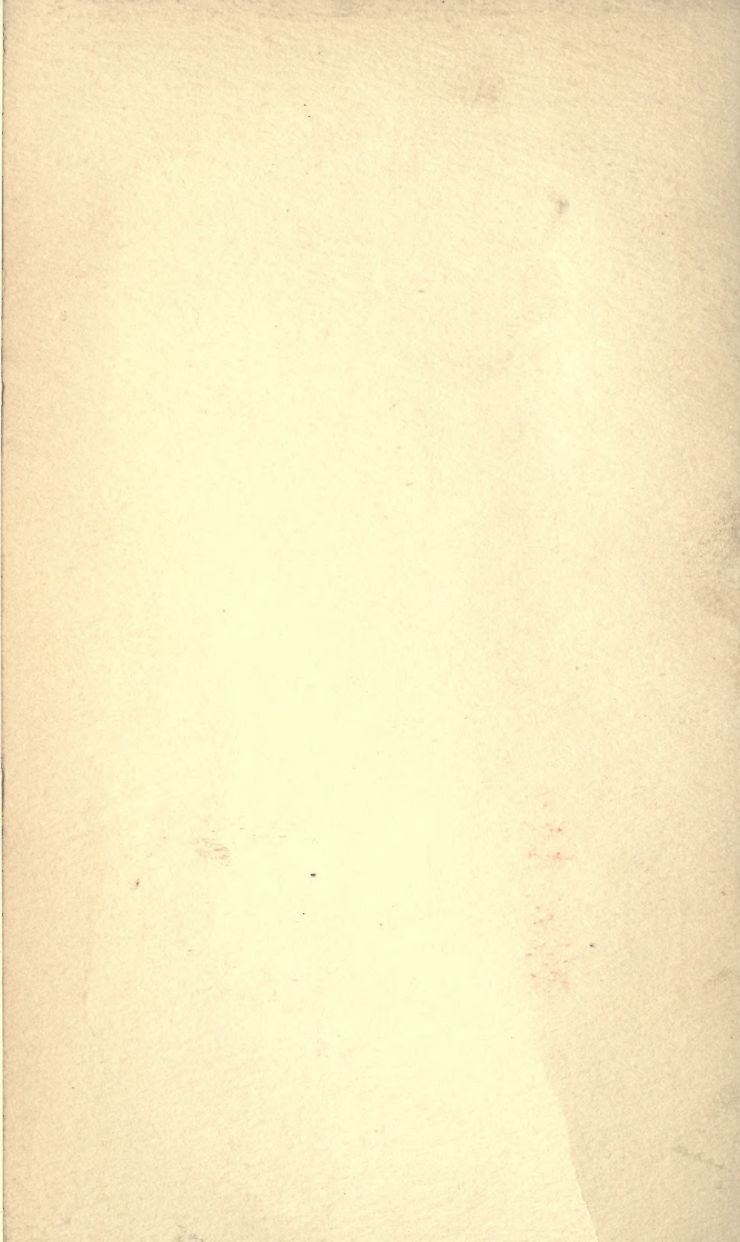
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